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## ABSTRACT

The dynamic and emerging social reality of the liberal/capitalistic Western World has created a new type of personality, the characteristics of which the educational community must be aware. Although early capitalism stressed production, the present emphasis features consumption as the dominant activity. The acquisitive, hardworking individual has been replaced by the shallow, easily swayed, self-infatuated individual. The collapse of the classic bourgeois family has led to the erosion of privacy and the impoverishment of imagination and fantasy. The stimulation of infantile cravings by an advertising industry that requires people to be unsatisfied, combined with the loss of meaningful work and the usurpation of parental authority, have all contributed to the formation of a new character. The newly emerging personality is characterized by feelings of diffuse dissatisfaction, a fear that existence is futile, depression, fantasies of alternative impotence and omnipotence, and a search for instant intimacy. The rebelliousness of white middle-class youth is focused within the family and the schools. Those responsible for the higher education institutions must prepare teachers to face the historical period in which we live. (KC)

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# A Radical and Pessimistic View of American Youth

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This writer's most recent attention has been directed to the work of Western Marxists. My monograph, which is entitled: The Frankfurt School: An Analysis of the Contradictions and Crises of Liberal Capitalist Societies (Ball State Monograph Number Twenty-Nine, Muncie, Indiana, 1980), did not deal specifically with school or adolescent problems in the West, or in America. The fact is that schools and adolescents are not independent of, nor immune from, the brute data of the society of which they are a part.

The concept of the one-dimensional status quo being used in this monograph consists of various characteristics. Central to it... is capitalist hegemony based upon monopoly capitalism's power to control production and distribution. The persistence of class is fundamental to it as a system within which powerful capitalists decide upon societal priorities. This advanced industrial system is monopolistic and class stratified, but it has brought a plethora of consumer goods to the masses of people in the mature western economies.

Herbert Marcuse calls advanced industrial society in the capitalist West a one-dimensional society: a society which is irrational as a whole because its productivity is destructive of the real development of human potential. Beneath the media portrayal of a society which is beyond ideology, because of its alleged acceptance of the status quo, lies the ferment of contradictions endemic to a system which cannot be made into authentic democracy or community. The production of socially destructive and/or useless products continues within a society where economic privation is still a reality for many. Racism

persists as a social cancer. Sex exploitation and the confusion of roles for men and women threaten to endanger further the very core of a society which lacks the rootedness of community. This post-Christian, advanced industrial society, which operates under capitalist hegemony, features solipsistic privatism, weird behavior, an unhealthy fundamentalist religious revival, a banal mawkish nostalgia, alienation, anomie, a sickening pornography, debased art, and the celebration of violence. This is not an exhaustive list.

Capitalist industrial development has systematically destroyed, or has attempted to destroy, the value system of any group within the society which has nonacquisitive, or nonaccumulative, motives and/or goals. The communal craftsman has lost his tools, his former control over apprenticeships, and over the work process itself. The home, family, extended family, and craftguild have been replaced by factory production, wherein "intelligence" is increasingly built into capitalist-owned machinery. White collar workers, including teachers, are subject to the forces of de-skilling.

The role of the public school in America has been constant: accordingly it has (1) asserted the legitimacy of the capitalist mode of production and class structure; (2) prepared willing workers who consider their entry into the consumer market a substitute for real democratic power; (3) increasingly used "scientific" tests to "prove" merit and/or the lack of it; and, (4) removed educational costs from the dominant class to the public as a whole. The school and the social "reforms" which serve to

buttress the economic, political, social, cultural, and educational needs of the dominant class have succeeded. The other reforms have failed or were never attempted.

The following is from the afterword of the Frankfurt School monograph; in fact, it is from the very last lines!

In conclusion, the hope for school reform is not independent of the issues described and analyzed in this monograph. The focus on intramural, narrowly pedagogic issues reduces almost everyone to an unwitting apologist for the status quo. Those of us who are interested in authentic school reform must educate ourselves on the great issues of our time... In a society which tempts us all with the easy life, we must resist and work in a disciplined manner. In a period of familial disintegration we must work at keeping close relationships long-lasting and rich. Asceticism and sacrifice must be balanced with the ability to enjoy aesthetic and lyrical experiences - and, in fact, to create moments and objects of beauty. In a time of fragmented personality we must struggle to be whole and integrated. None of these characteristics are easily achievable because the status quo does not need nor want them.

## 2

How do the main characteristics of the contemporary capitalist industrial, liberal status quo affect the family, the parents, and the school-age offspring? What kind of character type will the teachers come to deal with in the K-12 schools? It is this writer's contention that a radical and hard look must occur if we are to honestly prepare our college students to deal realistically with the students and conditions that they must surely face once on the job. Although

Christopher Lasch did not write Haven In A Heartless World: The Family Besieged, nor, The Culture of Narcissism from within the Frankfurt School, there is a coinciding, and an agreement, between Lasch and the comrades of Frankfurt. Lasch's more specific analysis of family and character type is logically connected to the analyses of the neo-capitalist West by the German thinkers. The work of Samuel Bowles, and Herbert Gintis, especially in their Schooling In Capitalist America is within the Marxist tradition, although their analysis is more deterministic than that of Marcuse, Adorno, Horkheimer, et al. Jules Henry's Culture Against Man is not avowedly Marxist, but much of his analysis is in agreement with the broad general picture painted by thinkers in the Frankfurt tradition. The analyses of the American thinkers provides a useful tool which allows us to grasp the dynamic and emerging social reality of the late twentieth century in the liberal capitalistic West.

All of these thinkers have agreed that during the early history of capitalism, which emphasized production, the ideal man was the acquisitive, hard-working type - the kind of person whose emotional malfunction was likely to be hysteria and obsession. Today's late, or neo-capitalism features consumption as the dominant activity; therefore, the psychological type that it creates - in order to build-up the largest possible market - is the shallow, easily swayed self-infatuated person whose emotional malfunction, according to Lasch, is likely to

be narcissism. Narcissism can be described as excessive self-love, obsessive interest in one's own: appearance, comfort, importance, attributes, etc.

The historian, Christopher Lasch, tells us that we are living in a time of the collapse of the classic bourgeois family. The psychic results are the erosion of real privacy, and the impoverishment of imagination and fantasy. Perhaps most importantly, there has been a weakening of the capacity for self-regulation. Lasch, who is certainly a radical, still believes that only now that the collapse of the bourgeois family has entered what may be its final stage is it possible to see, that in spite of its repressiveness and authoritarianism, the old-fashioned family sometimes produced something of value: namely, the capacity for independent thought and judgement. Under more permissive and egalitarian conditions, within a decadent liberal capitalist system, this capacity seems to be withering away.

Lasch, Jules Henry (as well as Freud) believe that in the early years the child experiences intense emotions regarding his or her parents. Only by working through these feelings, and by coming to terms with his ambivalent emotions concerning his father can the boy properly resolve the Oedipal complex. Daily contact with the father allows for a softened and more realistic picture of his father, and of the world, than is possible in the absence of such daily interaction between father and son. Before capitalism and industrialism took the tools from the parents and placed (forced), first the father, and

then even the mother, into various kinds of factories, the daily contact and interaction between parents and children enabled the parent to establish himself in his son's affections through his mastery of the skills and techniques that the son knew he would have to learn in order to make it in the world. Bowles and Gintis speak of the New England shoemakers being compelled to move into the factories; moreover, Harry Braverman's, Labor and Monopoly Capitalism: The Degradation of Work in the Twentieth Century documents the workers' loss of control over their places of work and apprenticeship training.

According to Lasch's interpretation of Freudian theory, the introjection of the father's position in the world, his values, into the son's psyche, in the form of a conscience gives rise to aggression against the self, and others; however, it also makes possible the formation of standards that are independent of prevailing political fashions and of immediate self-interest. The superego furnishes a standard against which to weigh, evaluate, judge, and even to condemn authority imposed from the outside. This kind of socialization, in which an early and powerful identification with the parents occurs, is the decisive element; however, we know that it causes repression and guilt that is found to be intolerable by most within contemporary Western society (see Philip Rieff's, Triumph of the Therapeutic).

The so-called "helping professions" have arisen in America and they have steadily worked at preventing an intense identification with parents. The men and women who came into the factories to work could be more easily bossed than when they worked in

their own homes. As we know, production was broken down into smaller and more specialized units so that no worker had knowledge of the whole. The craftsman father gave way to the factory hand under capitalist production; however, the system necessitated even greater familial and psychological changes. Capitalist sales and purchasing/consumption necessities have caused the intrusion of teachers, social workers, and other "helpers" into the family itself, so that bourgeois era family patterns of socialization could give way to new ones which are dominated by character types who have virtually uncontrolled desires for immediate gratification. The men who made the capitalist revolution(s) in the European early modern period are comical anachronisms during the twilight period of decadent, monopoly, consumer capitalism. The worker is called upon to work as a driven calvinist from eight to four-thirty, but then to miraculously convert himself into a hedonistic consumer after work. The created (by advertisement) needs will be satisfied by purchasing within the consumer mart of monopoly capitalism. Modern capitalism is producing, partly through the altered and weakened family, the peer groups, and the culture industry a new type of personality - one that is very different from the internally regulated and autonomous individual of the classic bourgeois period. Lasch believes that we have undergone the weakening of the psychic basis of democracy, namely, the self-reliant, autonomous, inner-directed citizen. Our society is undergoing massive shifts in character formation and type.

According to Lasch, an extreme description of the newly emerging character type can be stated as follows: feelings of diffuse dissatisfaction; a fear that existence is futile; depression; violent oscillations in self-esteem; slavery to impulse; difficulty in controlling inner rage; inner emptiness and chronic boredom; fantasies of alternating omnipotence and impotence; a ravenous need for admiration; insatiable cravings; an unappeasable hunger for "experience," a search for instant intimacy; pseudo self-insight; an intense fear of old age; a fascination with, and jealousy of, celebrities; an unreasonable fear of competition and criticism; and the inability to suspend belief and judgement. This emerging narcissistic character type is not likely to be the kind of person who believes that there exists a rational nature of things; nor does he or she believe that rational cognitive tools exist within persons which enable knowledge of such a rational cosmos. This new character type has difficulty believing in the stability of anything. It follows that this person does not, and cannot, see the future as a benevolent unfolding of rational, understandable events. The implications of what has just been described are grave for the American educational process.

In our time success becomes a function of youth, glamour, and novelty. The hard-working person who is dedicated to craft, profession, or even company, becomes a laughable anachronism. The old ethic of postponement of gratification, which emerged from the protestant and capitalistic revolutions, becomes untenable because in a secular age, only a fool would put off gratification when he no longer believes in the future. The narcissistic personality type functions well in a decadent culture. He does

especially well within the corridors of the bureaucracies, because it is here where a premium is placed upon the ability to manipulate interpersonal relations. The young men who possess "visibility" and who are said to have "momentum" are the types that we are exhorted to emulate.

The stimulation of infantile cravings by an advertising industry that requires us to be perpetually unsatisfied, combined with the loss of meaningful work and the usurpation of parental authority have all contributed to the formation of a new kind of character type. Narcissism appears (albeit subconsciously) to many as the best way of coping with the problems and anxieties of our time; therefore, latent narcissistic tendencies are brought out and threaten to become dominant. Modern men and women in the West are directed to work so that they may consume. Regarding consumption, with the promise of perpetual and complex gratification as a final goal, is a revolutionary historical condition. Even the youth are elevated to the level of full-fledged consumer status. The ad-man of decadent liberalism and consumer capitalism emancipates women and children from patriarchal authority; however, the newly freed are now subjected to the new paternalism of the advertising industry, the consumer mart, the bureaucracies, and the state.

Since our decadent consumer society seems to no longer value qualities like self-restraint, the abdication of parental authority instills in the young the character traits demanded by a corrupt merchandise mart. This decline of parental authority reflects the decline of the superego itself. The appearance of permissiveness

conceals a real system of new controls, one that avoids direct confrontation. Confrontation provokes arguments about political principle, so the authorities delegate discipline to "gofers", flak-catchers, teachers, cops, etc. This delegation of power allows the illusion of the powerful being merely advisers, resource persons, and friends. Richard Sennett calls this camouflage, the "boss's new clothes." Our society is dominated by a corporate elite, and its priorities, but the widespread, mistaken belief is that no one is in charge.

The central aim of our society seems to be the sale of goods: the corollary is, of course, to produce buyers. Advertisers serve as teachers, and kids learn at an early age that consumption is a way of life. Under the urgencies of the consumer life, and the suspicion that hard work is not worth the effort, ancient impulse controls are breaking down. We appear to be shifting from a society in which superego values were ascendant to one in which the values of the id are triumphant. It used to be that kids wanted to enter the world of their parents, and of other adults, but today in America the demand is that the parents, and especially the father, enter into the child's or adolescent's world. The father is transformed into an imp of fun!

It is against this background that Jules Henry tells us that these are not delinquents, nor disturbed kids who are tearing the social structure from its hinges, but nice suburban boys and girls who are merely being given their heads. Henry tells his readers that if there is such a thing as an adolescent culture its basic power derives from its ability to conteract the adult superego.

American kids, according to both Henry and Lasch, are id creatures who live in the glow of consumption. The kids have been able to rebel against the tyranny of guilt because father, who once was the source of superego responsibility, and of guilt for wrongdoing, now wears the emblem of Puck (a mischievous sprite, from Shakespeare's A Midsummer Night's Dream). The kids' "victory" is easy because the militia has deserted to the rebels. Fathers are no longer aloof and stoic figures; instead, they seek emotional gratification from their kids. The parent often thinks that he needs love so badly that it seems more important than the need to train the child into maturity and citizenship. The parent becomes driftwood in the tide of the child's demands.

Institutions of cultural transmission (school, church, family, etc.), which might have been expected to counter the trends described herein, have all too often been shaped by the same developments. The parents seek to make their own homes into "havens in a heartless world;" unfortunately their efforts are undermined by the same pressures that made it necessary to seek a haven in the first place. Too often the "helping" literature suggests techniques which derive from industrial sociology, personnel management, etc. -- in other words, from the apparatus of social control itself. Many American parents seem to find it easier to be obeyed by bribery rather than by confronting the emotional turmoil which is inevitably connected with suppressing the child's, or adolescent's, demands.

The false idea behind the cult of I/me, is that inside of every person there is a glorious, talented, and attractive personality. If this beautiful person would forget about convention and courtesy, if he would boldly do what he feels to be imperative, then his attractiveness would be evident for all to see.

## 3

It is against the background of what has been sketched out in this essay that American teachers are called upon to do their jobs. In addition to parents, it has been the K-12 teacher who has born the brunt of the massive character change within the decadent liberalism of the late capitalist period. It is the teacher who has had to put up with verbal abuse, insubordination, non-compliance, lack of appreciation, and even violence. Such behavior hurts teachers most when it is visited upon them by the sons and daughters of the white middle class, because these youngsters have been precisely the group for whom the American schools were built. I began with Marxist views concerning the macro-society, then narrowed the focus to describe the character type formation during this period; allow me to conclude with some specific reasons for white middle class youth's anti-social behavior. The school and its personnel always expected the children of workers, and of minorities, to fail, but they are unprepared for the contemporary rebelliousness of white middle class youth.

The following list is not intended to be exhaustive nor definitive. However, it provides the narrower focus which allows

us to move from Marxist analysis of the status quo to a specific look at the schools and their population. White middle class youth's frighteningly anti-social behavior, which began in the middle nineteen sixties, may now be focused within school and family instead of the Berkeley campus.

(1) One of the underlying causes of such behavior could be described as the permissiveness heresy which celebrates each person's uniqueness, and which insists that adults should be sensitive to the child's, or adolescent's, every nuance of feeling. (2) Secondly, is liberal theory which emphasizes the individual, and his/her freedom, and which downplays the rights of family and community. (3) The protestant belief that persons can know God without the mediation of community, liturgy, hierarchy, and historical church. (4) The drive toward hedonistic pleasure which is now a mass phenomenon in America, and the West. (5) The capture of science by the merchandise mart: a belief that the magic of science can be bought to alleviate pain and anxiety. (6) The persistence of anti-intellectualism and the rise of the primary feeling. (7) The contempt felt by the professional middle class towards workers. Teachers appear to be workers in the eyes of many affluent Americans. This view is not lost on their children. Arrogant white middle class kids may condescendingly view their teachers as mere workers. (8) An historical period in which the laws have been violated by both the political right and left -- violations which were supposedly committed in the name of higher principles.

(9) The decline of the family, especially of the father's position. A radical increase in divorce, and of women involved in the job market. (10) The rise of narcissistic character types coupled with the decline of the superego. And finally, (11) The process of de-skilling teachers: teachers reduced to playing the role of classroom managers; harmless innovators; and the administrators of expertly constructed, slick, curricular packages. The widespread use of drugs is not being taken into consideration within this essay, but the phenomena may have a bearing on the problems addressed herein.

## 4

It is important and necessary for scholars and teachers to study, in order to define adolescence, and adolescents, during this historical period. The studies must not be confined to psychology, in fact, the conceptual descriptions must be historically rooted, sociologically sophisticated, and philosophically profound. In addition to conceptual and theoretical work, there must occur empirical effort as well. For academic, as well as practitioner reasons, we must develop useful, accurate and explanatory concepts which allow understanding and intelligent dealings with our youth. The need to do this job is especially crucial in the teachers colleges, and/or colleges of education. These institutions of higher learning often fail in terms of preparing their graduates to face the historical period in which we live. The lack of

success with regards to analyzing how the youth (the adolescents) are affected and formed by the brute forces of a society which is not yet authentically democratic, nor a community of shared value, is a serious failure indeed.

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